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SUBJECT: ANTI-TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (TIP) ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On February 7 the Ambassador hosted a round-table discussion on trafficking in persons with 12 NGO representatives and three government officials working in related fields. Although there was no single working definition of "trafficking" or common assessment of the scope of the problem, all interlocutors agreed on the need for better coordination among various actors, as well as for a national database on trafficking crimes. End summary.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador hosted a trafficking in persons roundtable organized by USAID for representatives of 12 NGOs and three government offices on February 3. The participating organizations were: The Center for Policy Alternatives; International Labor Organization (ILO); American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS); PEACE Organization; Migrant Services Commission; Child Vision; Child in Need Development Association (CINDA); Dimuthu Child & Youth Association (DCYA); Eradicating Sexual Child Abuse, Prostitution and Exploitation (ESCAPE); Janasetha Sahana Foundation (JSF); Lawyers for Human Rights and Development (LHRD); International organization for Migration (IOM); Police Bureau for Protection for Women and Children; Department of Probation and Childcare; and the Department of the Attorney General.

¶3. (U) The round-table participants did not have a universally agreed-upon definition of trafficking, and none had an accurate overview of the scope of the problem in Sri Lanka. Discussants acknowledged that some internal trafficking occurs, including but not limited to serving the purposes of labor or sexual exploitation. In addition, the participants spoke about the importance of safe migration, in particular for the 800,000 migrant workers who leave Sri Lanka annually to seek employment overseas, primarily in the Middle East. It is estimated that of the total number going abroad to work, some percentage included under-aged child workers sent to the Middle East, and including those cases, a total of 30-40,000 employees experience "bad outcomes" annually. Considering those factors, all the round-table attendees agreed on the need to work to

improve definitions, data collection and tracking systems for migrants.

¶4. (SBU) The need for a better coordinated and more strategic approach to anti-trafficking training programs, especially for policy, was a common theme. The ACILS representative said that in April 2006, Sri Lanka's penal code changed to cover trafficking in persons specifically as a crime. Although ACILS and other organizations have sponsored training sessions for police regarding the new law, there have been no prosecutions to date, and most police still lack adequate knowledge about laws governing trafficking crimes.

¶5. (SBU) The lack of coordination between the various groups involved in anti-trafficking programs was a common theme. ACILS interlocutors and a senior program coordinator from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said they sought to institute a monthly "Beat the Traffic" breakfast for practitioners to coordinate training and other efforts. Many attendees supported the measure because, they said, such coordination is currently lacking. The Deputy Solicitor General said it would be most useful if the group met outside of the government purview and prepared an outcome document to share with the president. He said it should include specific steps the government could take to better combat trafficking in persons.

¶6. (SBU) Several interlocutors offered areas in which the government could provide assistance. The International Labor Organization's national program manager urged that the National Child Protection Agency (NCPA) recommence its cyber-watch program, and several other speakers noted the need for special child protection measures. The IOM representative said the lack of shelters and rehabilitation

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facilities for victims was another difficult challenge to overcome.

¶7. (SBU) The executive director of the Center for Policy Alternatives said there was a strong need for a nationalized database of trafficking crimes, with NGOs allowed limited access to the information. The IOM officer said her organization is working with the Department of Immigration and Emigration and the Bureau of Foreign Employment to create a computerized system to monitor people leaving and re-entering Sri Lanka. She added that with additional funding and assistance, IOM could expand the database to track trafficking-related crimes under the new 2006 law that specifies penalties for trafficking.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Initially, we had envisioned government facilitation of a series of meetings on trafficking in persons, similar to the successful NGO forum that meets monthly. However, several of our interlocutors felt that an independent forum arranged by and for the NGO community would better serve the needs of the group. We will continue to engage with the NGO actors to urge follow-up on the proposal. If the group produces an outcome document, the Ambassador will share it with appropriate government officials. Mission will also develop a proposal to help the government of Sri Lanka establish a nation-wide database of trafficking crimes for consideration by INL and G/TIP.

Blake